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ABSTRACT

The standard spoken usage of a language is often referred to as the "educated" version of the language. This study investigated the degree to which this assumption applies to Hungarian. Data were drawn from the 1988 Hungarian National Sociolinguistic Survey of a stratified sample of 850 adult Hungarians. Subjects completed three major types of task, including: grammaticality judgments; spoken sentence completion; and spotting and correcting mistakes in a written passage. The questionnaire used contained heavily stigmatized grammatical features, items of divided usage in verb conjugation, hypercorrect items, items subject to ongoing syntactic change, and other variables. In general, results indicate that educational level of the respondent was not a discriminating factor in any of the 34 grammaticality judgment tasks or the 16 sentence completion tasks. It is suggested that the reason many educated Hungarians speak nonstandard or uneducated Hungarian lies in post-World War II national social history, including democratization of the educational system without increased pedagogical strength to accommodate the larger enrollments, the forced restructuring of Hungarian society, and some pressure to push working-class students into higher education. It is concluded that the equation of educated and standard language usage does not apply in Hungarian in general, but Hungarians whose parents are both university-educated use the standard Hungarian forms of the language. (MSE)

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Does the Educational Level of Speakers Matter in Hungarian Language Use?

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ABSTRACT

The standard variety of some language X is often referred to as "educated X." It is shown that the equation "standard X = educated X", which may work for English and some other languages, does not hold for Hungarian. Grammaticality judgment and sentence completion data gathered for the Hungarian National Sociolinguistic Survey show no significant interaction between informants' educational level and their responses. The explanation lies in the forced restructuring of Hungarian society after WW II. However, informants whose parents are both university-educated, used the Standard Hungarian forms.

INTRODUCTION

References to a standard variety of some language X as "educated X" have preceded modern sociolinguistic studies by several decades.[1] Daniel Jones, for instance, equated British public school pronunciation with the "standard of pronunciation" (cf. Crowley 1987). Much later Trudgill (1983:17) referred to Standard English as the variety used in print, taught in schools, and "normally spoken by educated people." Quirk et al (1985:7 and 18) say that the standard variety is associated with the educated users of the language, hence educated English comes to be referred to as Standard English.

Bartsch (1987:140 and 210) refers to "the cultural, economic and political élite" of a society as the bearer of the standard language variety. Subbaya (1980) lists the following as a favorable condition for a variety becoming standard: "The variety is spoken by a prestigious group, whereby prestige is defined in terms of political or economic power and education" (quoted from Bartsch 1987:251).

In a recent paper Stalker (1986:50) says that in defining Standard English "The difficulty is, as has been for the past two hundred years, in deciding who uses this dialect and in delineating its features."

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate who uses Standard Hungarian (SH) from the point of view of the educational level of speakers. It will be shown that the equation "standard X = educated X", which may work for English and some other languages, does not hold for Hungarian.

THE DATA

The Hungarian language community in the Republic of Hungary is a normatively regulated one. In dictionaries, grammars and good usage books the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has regulated Standard Hungarian since the 1830s. At least among scholars, there is widespread agreement about what linguistic forms are part of SH and what counts as Nonstandard Hungarian (NSH). In the Hungarian literature there are some references to the educational level of SH speakers, e.g. Nádasdy (1985:225) defines Educated Colloquial Hungarian (a variety somewhat different from Standard Literary or 'Radio' Hungarian) as "the spoken language of educated people in Budapest." However, because no Hungarian linguist has ever tried to define the term "educated people", references to the language variety spoken by them are of limited value.

The data to be analyzed here comes from the HUNGARIAN NATIONAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY designed by C. Pléh (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), T. Terestyéni (Hungarian Public Opinion Research Institute) and myself. In 1988 a 30-minute pen-and-paper questionnaire was administered to a random stratified sample of adult Hungarians (N=850). Three major types of data were gathered: (1) grammaticality judgments, (2) spoken sentence completion data, and (3) spotting and correcting written mistakes in a passage. The sample of informants is representative of the adult Hungarian population in terms of age, sex, education, and settlement type as shown by the 1980 census.

EDUCATION DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE

Among other things our questionnaire contained heavily stigmatized grammatical features, items of divided usage in the conjugation of verbs, hypercorrect items with regard to the use of the inessive ending *-ban* 'in' and the illative *-ba* 'into', items subject to an on-going syntactic change and other variables. One remarkable finding is that the educational level of speakers is not a discriminating factor in any of the 34 grammaticality judgment tasks or the 16 sentence completion tasks we used.

In SH verbs ending in *-t* have a distinction between indicative and subjunctive: *nyitja* 'he opens it' vs. *nyissa* 'let him open it', *ragasztja* 'he glues

it' vs. *ragassza* 'let him glue it'. In NSH the subjunctive form is used in the indicative as well. The Nonstandard use of such verbforms is generally regarded as rural, lower class and/or uneducated. Results of our survey show that this is the most heavily stigmatized grammatical feature in the Hungarian language community. Yet, as Table 1 demonstrates, there is hardly any difference in the social distribution of this phenomenon, called *suksük*-conjugation[2], with regard to the educational level of speakers. For instance, the NSH sentence *Nem szeretem ha elhalasszák a döntést* 'I don't like their postponing the decision' was judged as grammatical by 55.4% of the least educated informants and by 57.3% of those with college/university degrees.

Table 1
Crosstabulation: NY109 JUDGMENT NEM SZERETEM HA ELHALASSZAK By EDUCATION4

ISKOLA4->	less than 8 yrs	8 yrs	12 yrs	college degree	Row Total
NY109					
1 UNGRAMMATICAL	87	157	75	32	351
	84.7	165.9	67.8	32.6	43.4%
	24.8%	44.7%	21.4%	9.1%	
	44.6%	41.1%	48.1%	42.7%	
	10.8%	19.4%	9.3%	4.0%	
2 GRAMMATICAL	108	225	81	43	457
	110.3	216.1	88.2	42.4	56.6%
	23.6%	49.2%	17.7%	9.4%	
	55.4%	58.9%	51.9%	57.3%	
	13.4%	27.8%	10.0%	5.3%	
Column Total	195 24.1%	382 47.3%	156 19.3%	75 9.3%	808 100.0%

Chi-Square	D.F.	Significance	Min E.F.	Cells with E.F.< 5
2.34477	3	.5040	32.580	None

Number of Missing Observations = 0

Below is a selective list of variables which show some of the cases in which educational level does not significantly discriminate among Hungarians:

Variable	Status
suksük-conjugation	heaviest stigmatized
misplaced question particle, e.g. *Nem-e igaz...?* 'Isn't it true...?' (SH *Nem igaz-e...?*)	second most stigmatized

an on-going syntactic merger: *Természetesen, hogy igazad van* 'Naturally that you're right'[3]	change
inessive vs. illative	slightly stigmatized
ik-conjugation[4], e.g. *vitatkozom* vs. *vitatkozok* 'I argue'	divided usage

As is to be expected, we have found differences between the judgment and sentence completion data. However, the Chi-square test has shown no significant differences at the $p \geq 0.05$ level between speakers of different educational levels on any item, whether judgment or completion.

SOCIAL EXPLANATION

What needs to be answered now is why many educated Hungarians speak Nonstandard or uneducated Hungarian. The answer lies in post-WW II Hungarian social history.

After the Communist takeover in 1948 the educational walls between social classes disappeared. Democratization of Hungarian education meant, for instance, a large increase in the number of students graduating from high schools: in 1988-89 over 50,000 students graduated compared to about 5,000 in 1936. Social classes which had earlier been deprived of secondary and higher education came to have similar access to education as middle class children, although the school system has never become pedagogically strong enough to compensate for the class and educational background of the children (cf. Kádár-Fülöp & Báthory ms.).

The forced restructuring of Hungarian society also brought with it a large number of what Kádár-Fülöp & Báthory (ms.) call "cheap certificates", i.e. college/university degrees obtained by working class people in evening and correspondence courses.

Until the early 1960s Hungarian schoolchildren with at least one parent who was a manual laborer enjoyed various officially-granted advantages in their school career. After the abolition of this policy the government set up various extra-curricular programs to compensate for the cultural-educational handicaps of children in blue-collar families. This milder pressure to push working class students into higher education existed until the very end of Communist rule, that is the spring of 1990.

All this has resulted in a heterogeneous social group with college/university degrees, which contains many individuals who are first-

generation intellectuals and oftentimes with poor higher education. From the point of view of the social distribution of linguistic variables this means a society which is linguistically EQUALLY HETEROGENEOUS AT ALL EDUCATIONAL LEVELS. One might say that the Communist efforts to homogenize Hungarian society have been successful in at least one respect: Hungarian language use is remarkably similar between groups with different education.

Such linguistic homogenization was made possible by the power structure of Hungarian society. Members of the Communist political and economic élite, if they retained their vernacular nonstandard speech, did not have to change their grammar because there was hardly any social pressure on them to do so. These people had all the power possible. When they had come into power they may have changed some of their habits or their clothing, but there was no linguistic threshold to cross. After all, they represented the "people" in a "people's democracy" (a euphemism for Communist dictatorship) consequently their speechways could certainly not be criticized openly.

Hidden criticism of those politicians, company directors, university professors or even members of the Hungarian Academy (a learned society very similar to the French Academy in language matters) who spoke Nonstandard Hungarian was manifest all through the decades after WW II, but it was obviously too weak to influence linguistic usage to any considerable degree.

THE EFFECT OF PARENTS' EDUCATION

However, the foregoing should not be taken to mean that there is no variation whatsoever between Hungarians with different levels of education. In some cases informants with completed secondary education come closest to SH, as in the grammaticality judgment of (1):

(1) *A kisfiú nem volt iskolába*
the boy not was school-into
SH: *iskolában*
school-in

Forty-three % of the informants with secondary education judged (1) ungrammatical, while only 36% of those with less than 8 years of schooling and the same percentage of the university-educated informants rated the sentence wrong. However, the Chi-square test shows no significant relationship between education and judgment at the .05 level.

Another example shows that more educated Hungarians favor a more standard form than their less educated compatriots. In one of the sentence completion tasks informants chose between the traditionally more standard

verbform *vitatkozom* 'I argue' and the less standard *vitatkozok*. Sixty % of those with less than 8 years of schooling chose *vitatkozom* while 71% of those with university degrees did so. The two educational groups between them scored 63% and 67% respectively. Whereas the tendency for educated people to favor the more standard form is undeniable, this tendency is not statistically significant (Chi-square > .05).

In her analyses of irregular English verbs in various American linguistic atlas data, McDavid (1988:355) has found, for example, that "the standard form *blew* is least common among Type I informants and most common among the college-educated." Researchers of the Survey of Vancouver English project have found that the effects of sex, education and mother's education are small but they are as they would be expected. "Correct" usage (i.e. standard forms) occurs proportionately more in women than in men, in university-educated persons more than the less-than-university-educated, and in persons whose mothers were university educated more than those whose mothers had less-than-university education (R.J. Gregg, personal communication, 11/11/1989).

In an attempt to decide who speaks SH, the hypothesis was formed that parents' education may play an important role. I chose several linguistic variables and ran variable by education by parents' education analyses. The variables used were verbforms like *vitatkozom/vitatkozok*, standard and nonstandard forms of *t*-final verbs, the misplaceable question particle, and the first person singular conditional ending of verbs (SH *-nék* vs. NSH *-nák*).

In some cases parents' education does not correlate with judgment and sentence completion data. In other cases, however, there is a strong correlation such that informants whose parents are both university-educated almost invariably use SH forms. As Table 2 shows, 6.7% of the informants who have fewer than two university-educated parents use the heavily stigmatized NSH verbform *nyissa* 'he opens it' but all informants whose parents are both university-educated, without regard to their own education, use the SH form *nyitja*.

Exactly the same pattern emerges from the analysis of the use of SH *válogatja* vs. NSH *válogassa* 'he sorts it'.

Analysis of the less heavily stigmatized *szukszük*-conjugation (e.g. SH *ragasztja* vs. NSH *ragassza* 'he glues it') again shows that informants whose parents are both university-educated use the SH forms.

Finally, all informants with two university-educated parents used the SH form of the *ik*-verb *alszom* 'I sleep' and 15 out of 17 chose to use the SH *vitatkozom* 'I argue'.

Note that the delineation of these SH informants was achieved by considering the educational level of BOTH OF THEIR PARENTS. A different picture emerges when the responses of informants with ONLY ONE UNIVERSITY-EDUCATED PARENT are analyzed. Table 3 shows the responses of such informants.

Table 2

Crosstabulation: NY306 SENTENCE COMPLETION KINYIT By EDUCATION4
Controlling for PARENTS' EDUCATION
Value = .00
FEWER THAN 2 U-ED PARENTS

ISKOLA4-> / NY306	Count / Exp Val / Row Pct / Col Pct / Tot Pct	less than 8 yrs	8 yrs	12 yrs	college degree	Row Total
NYITJA	1	177 173.5 24.9% 95.2% 23.3%	337 341.5 47.5% 92.1% 44.3%	141 139.0 19.9% 94.6% 18.5%	55 56.0 7.7% 91.7% 7.2%	710 93.3%
NYISSA	2	9 12.5 17.6% 4.8% 1.2%	29 24.5 56.9% 7.9% 3.8%	8 10.0 15.7% 5.4% 1.1%	5 4.0 9.8% 8.3% .7%	51 6.7%
Column Total		186 24.4%	366 48.1%	149 19.6%	60 7.9%	761 100.0%

Chi-Square	D.F.	Significance	Min E.F.	Cells with E.F.< 5
2.58491	3	.4601	4.021	1 OF 8 (12.5%)

Crosstabulation: NY306 SENTENCE COMPLETION KINYIT By EDUCATION4
Controlling for PARENTS' EDUCATION
Value = 1.00
2 U-ED PARENTS

ISKOLA4-> / NY306	Count / Exp Val / Row Pct / Col Pct / Tot Pct	8 yrs	12 yrs	college degree	Row Total
NYITJA	1	1 1.0 5.9% 100.0% 5.9%	6 6.0 35.3% 100.0% 35.3%	10 10.0 58.8% 100.0% 58.8%	17 100.0%
Column Total		1 5.9%	6 35.3%	10 58.8%	17 100.0%

Table 3

Sentence completion		Number of informants with only one u-ed parent, u-ed father	u-ed mother	Total
SH	*alszom*	21	8	29
NSH	*alszok*	3	5	8
SH	*vitatkozom*	17	6	23
NSH	*vitatkozok*	7	7	14
SH	*ragasztja*	21	10	31
NSH	*ragassza*	3	1	4
SH	*választja*	21	10	31
NSH	*válassza*	3	1	4
SH	*nyitja*	23	13	36
NSH	*nyissa*	-	-	-
SH	*válogatja*	21	8	29
NSH	*válogassa*	-	2	2

Thus while informants whose parents are both university-educated almost invariably used the SH variants of the items investigated, informants with only one university-educated parent showed variation in two of the three cases: *ik*-conjugation and *szukszük*-conjugation. In case of the most heavily stigmatized *suksük*-conjugation the latter group acted almost exactly like those with two university-educated parents. Hence it is concluded that Hungarians with two university-educated parents used SH forms, while among those with only one such parent there was variation between the use of Standard and Nonstandard Hungarian forms. In other words, it cannot be predicted whether a university-educated Hungarian uses Standard or Nonstandard variants of the six variables investigated, but on the evidence shown here the prediction can be made that Hungarians with two university-educated parents will use the Standard Hungarian forms.

NOTES

1.I am grateful to Susan Gal and András Kornai for their criticism of an earlier version of this paper.

2.*suksük*-conjugation is a popular term in Hungary, coined from the first person plural ending *-suk/-sük* replacing SH *-juk/-jük*. A certain degree of popular awareness of the difference between forms like *nyissa* and *ragassza* is evident in the existence of the less frequent term *szukszük*-conjugation.

3.Both (1) and (2) are correct in Hungarian:

(1) *Természetesen igazad van*
'Naturally you are right'

(2) *Természetes, hogy igazad van*
'It is natural that you are right'

There is an on-going syntactic merger shown in (3), which is not regarded as SH, despite the fact that about half of our national sample accept it as grammatical:

(3) *Természetesen, hogy igazad van*
'Naturally that you are right'

4.*ik*-verbal stems are a unique feature in Hungarian (for details see Vago 1980:78-9). In NSH *ik*-verbs may have the first person indefinite suffix /k/ instead of the regular /m/, e.g. *vitatkozok* instead of *vitatkozom* 'I argue'. Usage is divided; speakers of good Hungarian are advised and often strive to use the traditional *ik*-conjugation. Once historically distinct, *ik*- and non-*ik*-verbs no longer form separate systems but there is considerable variation and hypercorrection in the use of certain verbforms.

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